



WEST VIRGINIA CONTINUES TO MAKE PROGRESS WITH PREMISES/FARM IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM

Charleston, April 7, 2005—Farmers in West Virginia are embracing the animal identification program, with almost 2,500 of them registering their premises over the past few months.

The state has taken a leading role in moving forward with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) by encouraging participation in its Premises Identification System. During January, February and March, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) joined the West Virginia University Extension Service in a series of educational meetings to inform stakeholders about this important program.

The WVDA's goal for its Premises Identification System is to create a record of every farm in the state. According to Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass, the Premises ID program is a watershed initiative in the way this country manages its livestock herds. Information gathered for the program "will be used exclusively for dealing with animal health emergencies."

Obtaining a Premises Identification Number is a prerequisite to participating in the animal identification component of the NAIS. In the near future, involved producers will use radio frequency tags or other means to identify and track animals as they move in commerce. The system will facilitate a 48-hour traceback of any sick animal, thus protecting America's food supply and our nation's ability to market our agricultural products in other countries.

Melissa Garrett, the West Virginia Animal Identification Coordinator, says the state has worked hard to encourage stakeholders to get involved with the program. To generate enthusiasm, Garrett and others attended fairs, festivals, livestock association meetings, and Farm Bureau meetings in addition to the educational meetings hosted by WVDA and WVU Extension Service. State personnel also follow up with those who register.

Said Garrett, "After we put [a farm] in the system, we send the owner a certificate with their premises ID number on it. We also send them two cards that they can put in their pockets or billfold, so that they have their number on-hand if they need it."

"In addition," she said, "everyone who registers receives a thank you letter from Gus Douglass, our Ag Commissioner."

Garrett said that they've experienced a little bit of difficulty with 911 address verification but that USDA is working with them to overcome this challenge. Overall, she said, "Everything is running well, and we're excited to be moving ahead with the program."

For more information, or to register your farm via telephone, call WVDA's Animal Health Division at 304-558-2214 or 1-866-844-2214.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs, as mandated by state law. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials in West Virginia. Currently, Commissioner Gus R. Douglass is the longest-serving agriculture commissioner in the nation. For more information, visit www.wvagriculture.org.